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BOOK SELECTION

By

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ELVA L. BASCOM

*Carnegie Library School
Pittsburgh, Pa.*

MANUAL OF LIBRARY ECONOMY

XVI

REVISED EDITION

American Library Association

520 NORTH MICHIGAN AVENUE

CHICAGO

1930

A SELECTED LIST OF A.L.A. PUBLICATIONS

BOOK BUYING AIDS

A.L.A. catalog 1926; an annotated basic list of 10,000 books. 1926. Cloth, \$6.

The Booklist. A monthly guide to new books. \$2.50 per year.

Buying list of books for small libraries. New edition in preparation.

500 books for the senior high school library. 1930. Paper, 75c.

Graded list of books for children. 1930. Cloth, \$2.

Guide to reference books, fifth edition. Isadore G. Mudge. 1929. \$4; interleaved edition, \$4.50.

One thousand useful books. 1930. Paper, 75c.

Periodicals for the small library. F. K. Walter. Fifth edition. 1928. Paper, 65c.

Popular books in science. 1929. 25c.

LIBRARY ECONOMY

Book selection. F. K. W. Drury. 1930. Cloth, \$2.75.

Care and binding of books and magazines. 1928. 50c.

Circulation work in public libraries. Jennie M. Flexner. 1927. Cloth, \$2.50.

Essentials in library administration. New edition in preparation.

Introduction to cataloging and the classification of books. Margaret Mann. 1930. Cloth, \$3.

Order work for libraries. F. K. W. Drury. 1930. Cloth, \$2.25.

Public library administration. John Adams Lowe. 1928. Cloth, \$2.

Reasonable budgets for public libraries . . . O. R. H. Thomson. 1925. Cloth, 85c; Paper, 60c.

Reference work. James I. Wyer. 1930. Cloth, \$2.50.

Some principles of business-like conduct in libraries. Arthur E. Bostwick. 1928. 25c.

A survey of libraries in the U. S. 1926-1927. 4v. \$2 each.

The trustee and his library, 1927. Paper, 45c.

TYPES OF LIBRARY SERVICE

Library service for children. Effie L. Power. 1930. Cloth, \$2.75.

Children's library yearbook No. 1. 1929. Paper, \$2. No. 2. 1930. Paper, \$1.35.

College and reference library yearbook No. 1. 1929. Cloth, \$2.50. No. 2. 1930. Paper, \$2.

Budgets, classification and compensation plans for university and college libraries. 1929. Paper, \$1.15.

County library service. Harriet C. Long. 1925. Cloth, \$1.90.

The hospital library. E. Kathleen Jones. 1923. Cloth, \$2.25.

The library in the school. Lucile F. Fargo. 1930. Cloth, \$3.

School library yearbook No. 1. 1927. Paper, \$1.35. No. 2. 1928. Paper, \$1.65. No. 3. 1929. Paper, \$1.35.

XVI
BOOK SELECTION

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Introduction

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Introduction. The most fundamental work of the public library, the selection of its books, is often given little thought and in many libraries is relegated to the odds and ends of time left over from the day's routine or crowded into the last day or two before a book order is to be made up. That any system

should be employed in making the selection is not recognized by many otherwise excellent librarians, yet one will be found to exist in libraries which are most successful in meeting their people's needs with an adequate supply of good books. It is, nevertheless, the work in a library which lends itself to a system less easily than any other. This is accounted for by the two constantly changing elements on which selection depends, the readers and the books. A title may be held for many months until the expenditure is warranted, only to find that a better book is obtainable; or, when the purchasable book appears the need may no longer exist. The librarian can be truly called successful in book selection who knows, at a given time, what he can afford to buy on a subject, how to select the best for his community, whether the demand justifies the necessary expenditure, and when the need has passed.

With the enormous and constantly increasing output of books, the problem of selection becomes more difficult each year. Add to that the growing tendency among authors towards specialization, the ever-widening range of types of books—from mere compilations to special pleas—the large number of books on questions of the hour, the increased practice of revising and enlarging magazine literature for book publication, and the concession must be made that the librarian who selects for the average public library—often out of reach of the books themselves—can hardly have too many aids, provided they are reliable and he knows how to use them with discrimination.

Principles of Selection. A library should be built up according to a definite plan, to approach a certain ideal. Each book cannot, of course, be added solely to fit into that plan or ideal, and the growth of, or changes in, the community may wisely lead to a modification of it, but it should constantly be a controlling force in selection and should decide the question of purchase in cases of doubt.

"A building might be filled with books without there being a library. A collection of books is no more a library than a collection of lumber is a building or a collection of furniture constitutes a furnished home or a collection of pipes makes an organ. A library, however small, involves systematic selection and correlation of books. It must be built upon a plan and all materials that are to go into its making must be chosen to fit that plan, just as all the units that go to make up a house must be chosen to fit its plan. In a very small library, as in a very small house, the plan is very simple, but it is none the less essential."

THE BOOK. As most public libraries are, however, striving to accomplish much the same purpose, there are certain principles of selection which are applicable to all of them.¹

1. Select books that will tend toward the development and enrichment of life.

Test a book by asking what its effect will be on the life of the community. "The function of the library is the development and enrichment of human life in the entire community by bringing to all the people the books that belong to them."—Mrs. Fairchild.

2. Let the basis of selection be positive, not negative.

If the best you can say for a book is that it will do no harm, question your need of it. Every book should be of actual service to somebody, in inspiration, information, or recreation.

3. Select books on subjects in which individuals and groups in the community have a natural interest.

4. Provide for all the people of the community, not merely for those who are enrolled as borrowers.

5. So far as good books are obtainable and funds permit, represent in your selection every race, profession, trade, religious

¹ Acknowledgment is due to Mrs. S. C. Fairchild, who formulated the first principles of selection for the New York State Library School, and to a very helpful article written by Asa Wynkoop and contained in *New York Libraries* of May, 1914, "Outlines and references for library institutes: Stocking the library; part I, Selecting books." The excerpts quoted are taken from the latter.

or political doctrine, interest, and local custom found in the community. Keep in mind, however, that the library is primarily an educational agent, and do not admit books containing harmful doctrines or teachings.

6. Select some books of permanent value, regardless of whether or not they will be much used.

The great classics and the more popular "standards" should be in every library. They give it dignity and worth, and gain for it the respect of the educated portion of the community. The expense is proportionately small, as they can be obtained in inexpensive editions. It is difficult to determine the current book that will have permanent value, except in the case of a few that are beyond question. Great discrimination is needed in selecting among recent publications those that are of no immediate interest to the community as a whole, but are the best presentations of important subjects. Some concessions should be made to the thinkers and leaders in the community, but not to the extent of depriving the general public of its rightful share of good reading.

7. Select some books to meet the needs of only a few persons if by so doing society at large will be benefited.

"The library benefits not only those who use it, but all who come into relations with those who use it."

8. Do not allow the selection to be influenced by the personal equation or fad of any single person or group of persons.

"Strong men or women in the community are apt to over-emphasize some subject, and as they are apt to be on library book committees, this subject gets over-emphasized in the library. Get something that these people want, but not all. Remember that quiet, unobtrusive people who are not interested in any 'movement' have just as much right to the benefit of library money as more aggressive, forthputting people."

9. Keep a just proportion in the collection as a whole.

Hold constantly in mind the fact that a library's value is as

dependent on a well-balanced selection in the different classes as on a good supply of fiction and children's books. Make a general rule, then modify it as may seem wise.²

10. Of sectarian books get only those that are truly representative and likely to be used by the general reader or at least by a considerable number of readers, and treat all sects alike.

The same rule applies in general to textbooks, law books, medical books, or books devoted strictly to any profession. "The public library is not to supply the specialist with his regular tools, but only with the general literature of his subject."

11. As a rule, prefer an inferior book that will be read to a superior book that will not be read.

This is not always a safe rule to follow, since the inferior book may be of questionable worth, or interest in the subject may force readers to the better book if the poorer one is unobtainable.

12. Do not reject a book on the opinion of a few narrow-minded people who think it harmful or even bad.

The book which provokes thought, or even arouses opposition, regarding any of the constantly changing concepts of thought or springs of action is to be welcomed provided it does not seek to destroy the principles on which our civilization is based. The "advanced thought" of the last generation is in large measure the standard of action today. Have a definite standard of admission on moot subjects and keep within it except in the case of books which, despite radical tendencies, contain constructive ideas.

13. Do not sacrifice the interests of the student to those of the home reader.

The library should care for the person who uses reference books either for study or for unrelated information as carefully as for the one who reads only at home.

² For a table of percentages in each class consult F. K. W. Drury's *Book selection*, p. 244. A. L. A., 1930.

14. Do not strive for completeness. Select the best books on a subject, the best by an author. Do not get all of a series unless their merit or your need warrants your doing so.

15. Study your community and compare its needs with its demands. Welcome its recommendations, but use your judgment in following them.

16. Be a leader, not a follower. The librarian should be as much a leader in his community as the superintendent of schools or any minister. He has the great advantage of belonging to all the people. Remember the demagog in the French Revolution who said, "There go the people; let us hurry and overtake them—I am their leader."

Besides the principles which define a library's policy in the matter of book selection in general, the following specific questions will aid in deciding the value of a single book in a library. They are submitted only as suggestive of the sort of examination any book can be given, and make no pretense to completeness.³

a) Tests for books of information. 1. Subject-matter.—Is it a survey of a whole subject, or a part of it? Does it present theory or practice? Is it a history of the subject or a discussion of modern conditions? Is it a statement of facts or an argument? Is it the pronouncement of a man of authority, or a compilation of data from many sources? Does it relate to foreign conditions or to American, or does it cover both? Is it brief, exhaustive, or neither? If selective, is it well balanced and representative? These and other equally pertinent questions which arise as to the text should be considered solely with respect to the actual needs of the library for which the selection is being made. Unless care is exercised it is very easy to get books which treat only of the theory or history of a subject,

³ For tests to be applied to books in different classes (biography, history, travel, etc.) consult F. K. W. Drury's *Book selection*.

when the demand is largely for books relating to practice or current conditions.

2. Authority.—What are the author's qualifications? What has been his education and experience? Has he used source material? If secondary material, is it reliable? Does he understand thoroughly the period, facts, or theories with which he deals? Has he any bias?

3. Treatment.—Is the treatment concrete or abstract? Is it technical, semi-technical, scholarly, or popular? Is it a technical subject treated in such a popular manner as to be worthless? Is it designed for advanced or beginning students or the general reader?

4. Date.—Is it an old book? If so, does its date give it value or make it worthless? Is it valuable as the latest word on the subject? Or is the subject it treats so new that any book would be too slight to have value?

5. General make-up.—All books of information should have a table of contents and an adequate index. There has been great improvement in these aids to the quick and exact use of a book, and today very few publishers send out important books without both. There is still room for reform in the quality of the index, which is sometimes found in the test of actual use to be only a makeshift. A selected bibliography of books for further reading is a useful feature, especially if grouped by the chapter subjects.

There should be illustrations if the nature of the book gives them value. They should be pertinent to the text, well reproduced, and with definite, adequate legends. But no illustrations at all are preferable to those that are false or misleading. In some books of travel and description, and in many technical and scientific works, illustrations are often as valuable as, or even more valuable than, the text, and their omission is sufficient to condemn the book. Certain classes of books demand maps, such as histories, accounts of explorations, and routes of travel in

less-known parts of the world. In others charts are more illuminating than many pages of text to show advance, development, comparison, etc. A complete list of all such illustrative material should precede the text, as a convenience to the reader and in collation.

6. Physical make-up.—The typography is the most important feature of a book's physical make-up. The type should be large enough not to strain the eye, and the space between words and lines sufficient to make a clear, easily read page. The quality, tone, and finish of the paper affect very noticeably the clearness of the page. A cream-tinted, dull-finished paper of sufficient thickness to permit no penetration of the printing on the other side offers the best combination.

Binding and covers are beyond this brief survey. The quality of the binding processes is important, since the life of the book depends largely on them. The character of the covers is less important, except in children's books, where an attractive appearance means much in recommending a book.

The physical make-up of a volume cannot weigh very heavily beside the question of the text itself, especially in books of information. Where there is a choice, however, and the librarian is able to examine the books themselves, these matters should be taken into account.

b) Tests for books of inspiration. Discussion of the qualities an inspirational work should have would require more space than can be given to a single manual. The following questions are intended to be only suggestive:

1. Does the work show any degree of creative power?
2. To what extent does it reflect the author's personality?
3. Is it sincere?
4. Has it originality of conception? of expression?
5. Does it appeal primarily to the intellect or the emotions? If to the latter, has it self-restraint?
6. Is it of purely human interest, or has it also literary,

artistic, religious, ethical, or philosophic value?

7. Is the style a help or a hindrance to the thought?
8. Is the form appropriate to the thought?
9. Has it charm, beauty, color, imagery, melody?
10. Has it vitality? Will it endure as a permanent contribution to literature?

(C) Tests for fiction.³ In addition to the tests above:

1. Is the life it pictures true to nature? Or is it sensational? melodramatic? exaggerated? distorted? morbid?

2. Are the characters alive? Does the psychology of their acts ring true? Are they worth delineating? Do they throw any new light on the workings of the human mind and heart?

3. Is the plot original? hackneyed? ingenious? probable? involved? simple? Is it successfully worked out? Does it hold the interest?

4. Does it blur the hard-won line between right and wrong? / M¹³

5. If it depicts sin, is the author's attitude moral? immoral? unmoral?

6. Is its spirit that of good-will toward men? Does it engender a more kindly feeling toward human nature?

7. Does it leave a sense of completeness and satisfaction? / M¹⁴
Does it stimulate, inspire, or merely amuse?

THE READER AS AN ELEMENT IN SELECTION. A librarian may be a discriminating critic of books, with a fine appreciation of good literature and good workmanship, a keen scent for the false and superficial, and equally keen pleasure in able scholarship and clear analysis, but he must also be a lover and student of people in order to select books successfully. He needs to study his community as thoroughly as the successful merchant who buys clothing to suit its varied tastes. A detailed knowledge of its institutions, nationalities, religions, degrees of intelligence and education, moral and social standards—everything

³ Partly taken from Shuman's *How to judge a book*.

that indicates the nature, characteristics, and interests of the people the library aims to serve—should be as much a part of his working equipment as a knowledge of library administration. Without this grasp of the community life and intelligence it is not possible to make a wise selection among a half-dozen books on any subject which has a fairly large and varied literature. When a librarian asks a library commission to recommend two or three of the best books on a subject “for her library,” the question immediately arises: What class of readers does the librarian intend to satisfy with these books? In a small library, at least, the two factors in the problem, the book and the reader, can never be separated. For this reason the best book on a subject, intrinsically considered, may be the worst for a certain library to buy, if the test of a book is the good it may do in a community. The phrase “the best book” can seldom be used unmodified without being misleading. The wide difference in the intelligence, training, and needs of our public-library users renders general lists of recommended books indifferent aids, however carefully selected and annotated. Their selection must be based largely on inherent or comparative value; the touchstone—the community the list is to serve—cannot be applied.

While it is very desirable that the librarian should have a wide book knowledge, it is of greater importance that he should know the people he is trying to serve. There are many aids to information about books, but the librarian must gain at first-hand the thorough knowledge of his public that he needs in order to select books successfully for them.

A plea for the book-loving and book-reading librarian, however, may be excusable in this connection. A love of reading is a very practical asset to the librarian, and should be stressed in library schools. But beyond a love of reading, a careful discrimination in the choice of books for reading deserves greater emphasis than it receives. In small towns the librarian is often the sole guide to the world of books; if he reads indiscriminately

what the moment offers, why expect readers to do otherwise? Ruskin exclaimed, "Do you know, if you read this that you cannot read that?"—a reminder worthy of hanging before the librarian's as well as the loan desk. A list of books on books and reading is appended, which while designed primarily for use in inciting the unthinking person to read more or better books, contains some references of special value to the young librarian.

The activities, interests, institutions, and public spirit of a community should be reflected with some degree of completeness on the shelves of its public library. This is sometimes an unfair test of the librarian's ability, owing to the short life of the book, a paucity of funds, incapable predecessors, etc., but as a rule, if such subjects as education, child welfare, labor and industry, municipal government, civic improvement, public health and sanitation, and other matters of special interest in our wide-awake towns are represented by only a few stray titles or not at all, it is safe to conclude that the librarian is not living up to his opportunity; that he is probably following the line of least resistance by adding only to the obvious and already well-represented classes of history, travel, and literature, forgetting or ignoring the fact that he is thus serving only a part of his community, that he is not "bringing to all the people the books that belong to them." When he does that, every trade and industry, every homely, healthful, or artistic after-hour employment, every worthy club and society, will be reflected on the shelves of the library.

Practice of Selection. Granted that a librarian appreciates the need of definite principles of selection and has a thorough grasp of them, his community will not profit from them unless he is willing to give considerable time and thought to the actual work of selection. This should be accepted as a regular part of the day's work, not considered an added burden to be

postponed until necessity forces it into the schedule, to the detriment of other duties.

USE OF PRINTED AIDS. The first step in the routine of selection is to decide what aids are to be depended on for information about current books and about those of past times. This decision depends largely on the size of the library and the amount of the book fund. With a collection of ten thousand books or less and an appropriation of \$1,000 or less, the average library can manage very well with the *A. L. A. catalogs* and the *Booklist*, though both the *Standard catalogs* (p. 28) are desirable because of their annotation and analytical features. Libraries larger than this and having a larger appropriation will, as a rule, need a larger list to select from. This is especially true for the older books, since the three *Catalogs* represent a much more limited selection than does the *Booklist*. Many libraries find the addition of the volumes of the *Book Review Digest* sufficient. Librarians of other libraries no larger in size think they cannot do effective work without the *U. S. catalog* and the *Cumulative Book Index* also. This equipment entails a considerable expenditure, and should be undertaken only after a careful canvass of the situation. There is much to be said, however, in favor of as large a supply of bibliographic tools as can be afforded, since the librarian who takes the trouble to find exactly what he needs by use of them can usually borrow what he is not able to buy, either from the state commission or from another library. Few libraries today are dependent solely on what they can afford to buy.

Besides these publications there are many other useful aids, as the *Classified catalogues* of the Carnegie library of Pittsburgh, *Booklist books* (annual), Sonnenschein's *Best books*, etc. (See List of aids, p. 27.) All lists should be consulted with a realization of their limitations or bias; e.g., the three Pittsburgh catalogs represent the gradual growth of a single large library striving to meet the needs of its own city; in using them one

should keep in mind the fact that many of the books in the earlier catalogs are now out of date and perhaps replaced by better ones, that many titles are not suited to the small library, etc. In selecting books other than current, no title should be chosen, no matter how excellent the list containing it or how favorable the note accompanying it, without careful search in later or current lists to ascertain if it has not been supplanted by a better book, or has not been issued in a new edition.

For the selection of current literature the *Booklist* answers the need of most small libraries. Where a larger list is wanted, the *Book Review Digest* is usually added next. Many librarians feel the need of the more frequent news of books that is supplied in the *Publishers' Weekly*, *New York Herald Tribune Books*, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, *New York Times Book Review*, etc. To these the libraries of 25,000 and over usually add one or more of the English reviews—the *Nation and Athenaeum*, *London Times Literary Supplement* or *Spectator*, and perhaps one or both of the English trade journals—*Whitaker's Cumulative Booklist* and *The Publisher and Bookseller*. At least one of the best of the American weekly reviews should be taken because of the value to the librarian of the general articles, the longer reviews, and the news of authors, and because of its interest to bookish readers. It should be placed with the other newspapers.

The lists of additions in the bulletins of the large public libraries are helpful only when used with discrimination. They vary greatly in value, the selection in some being excellent and well balanced, in some very uneven, and in others decidedly poor as a whole. In most of them there is no way of determining what books have been chosen as valuable additions, what bought to meet an urgent need regardless of inherent value, and what added as gifts (sometimes worthless).

BOOK COMMITTEE. The usual order of procedure in selection is somewhat as follows: The librarian collects the titles

for consideration by the board or the book committee. The latter is preferable, as the board is likely to be too large a body to consider and agree on a list of books with wisdom and dispatch. This committee should be composed of educated people, but people who are in actual touch with the life of the community and who appreciate the responsibility and honor of acting for it. The school superintendent is usually a member, and frequently a valuable one. The membership should never be composed wholly of women, nor, if possible to avoid it, wholly of men, and none of them should be ruled by hobbies. Through his thorough knowledge of his library and its resources and his ability to give good reason for the selection of books he submits for approval, the librarian should command the confidence of the committee, and he should attend its meetings without question.

BOOK FUND. The book fund is greatly affected by the size of the library. It is relatively larger in the smaller library, since the cost of service is less. From 20 to 25 per cent of the library appropriation is near the average amount spent for books. Of this not more than one-fourth should be spent for fiction and one-fourth (or more) for children's books. This leaves about half the book fund for reference and classed books and periodicals, which is none too much considering their greater cost.

The fund should be divided into fairly equal portions and spent at regular intervals. The frequency of buying depends on the size of the fund, on the size of the library, and on the attitude of the readers. A library spending \$200 or less a year hardly needs to buy oftener than once in three or four months. The majority of libraries buy monthly; if near a large city even small libraries are inclined to buy weekly. Frequent purchases keep interest alive, but, on the other hand, they are more expensive (as to time and transportation charges) and tend to lower the standard of selection.

COLLECTING AND SIFTING TITLES FOR PURCHASE. The mechanical routine of selection is simple. Current lists and reviews are systematically checked, chosen titles (author, brief title, publisher, price, and source of information, note or review) are copied on cards of uniform size, or, better still if there are notes, the entries themselves are clipped and mounted on cards. A tray or filing box should be provided for this purpose. Books on special subjects or to meet special needs, new editions and replacements are added to this "consideration file." It can be kept in author order or classed according to the apportionment of the book fund: Class books, Fiction, Reference, Children's books, Foreign books.

When a book order is to be prepared, this accumulation of titles is sorted by subject and carefully sifted by consulting available reviews and by taking into account immediate needs and the amount of money available. They are compared with the catalog, shelf-list, and outstanding orders to avoid duplication of titles, and some sort of balance is attained between subjects. After the order has been made up, the withdrawn titles can be returned to their original file to await the next order or they can be arranged behind guides according to the decision made about them; e.g., the next to buy, desirable but too expensive at present, buy second hand, discarded, etc.

Readers should be encouraged to recommend books for purchase, and cards should be furnished for this purpose. To discourage indiscriminate requests, a reason for the purchase of the book should be required and any favorable information about it solicited. If the library finds it unwise to buy a book so requested, the reader should be given the reason for the decision.

FREE MATERIAL. The librarian who practices economy in book selection is constantly alert to discover the good material which can be acquired free of cost or for very little. The following classes are only suggestive:

1. Public documents: city, state, and federal. Among them

is some of the most valuable material a library can possess. Often a government bureau is the first to publish a bulletin on a new subject. The small library cannot make room for many long sets, but it cannot afford to neglect the current output of all but the more technical departments and bureaus. In larger libraries it should be a matter of pride to make easily available every federal, state, and city report or bulletin which could possibly be useful. The *Weekly List of Selected U. S. Government Publications*, the *Monthly Catalogue*, and the *Price lists* on various subjects that are compiled from time to time in the Superintendent of Documents' Office are worth the time it takes the busiest librarian to scan them. Many useful sets and single documents are noted in Manual XXIII, *U. S. Government documents*.

2. Railroad and steamship "literature." While not always strictly reliable, this material is often a very ready help. If the text is not needed, the illustrations are useful in the picture collection.

3. Philanthropic, charitable, civic, and political organizations' publications. Some of the first and best surveys of new movements are obtained from these sources, and they are more convenient and usually more reliable than magazine articles relating to them.

QUICK VS. DELIBERATE BUYING. The wise librarian has also learned to question whether or not his need for a new book is urgent. While it is often true that half the value of a book lies in having it when it is first wanted, it is almost as often the case that waiting will not lessen its usefulness. There are three reasons for waiting: (1) the book may not after all prove a worthy purchase when the opinion of expert reviewers (usually late) is obtainable; (2) a better one may follow close on the heels of the one chosen—this is frequently the case in new subjects; (3) in a few months or at most a year the book may

often be purchased at half-price or less through second-hand or remainder dealers, or through advertisement.

Reasons (1) and (2) bring up the question of immediate (or quick) versus deliberate buying, which every librarian must decide for himself. It is no doubt necessary in some libraries to buy promptly—at least in some classes of books—but it is difficult to believe that a group of fairly intelligent people who have confidence in their librarian will not wait with a reasonable degree of patience until the value of a book can be ascertained, especially if they understand that a worthless or useless book deprives them of the good one which might have been bought in its place. The quality of the selection in small libraries, especially in fiction, is greatly improved where the librarian has assumed this reasonable attitude on the part of his readers and has won them to it.

The small library does not reap the benefit it might from the second-hand agencies. A great saving can sometimes be effected through them if the librarian knows just what books he wants. The two difficulties are that the catalogs sent out contain all sorts of literature, making an actual knowledge of the books essential, and that the cost of transportation may make a small order cost as much as if bought through the regular trade. In the case of an expensive reference work, or one that is out of print, an advertisement in the *Publishers' Weekly* "Books wanted" column sometimes brings a copy when the second-hand dealers have failed to secure it. (See Manual XVII, *Order and accession department*, by Carl L. Cannon.)

The librarian who needs to economize will not buy subscription books. While it is true that some valuable works are published in this way, they are a very small part of the whole output and they can usually be obtained directly from a publisher or later in the regular trade or from second-hand dealers, often at a great reduction. As a rule, a subscription work is inferior in text, binding, and make-up to the ordinary book and

far more costly. The value of a subscription set can now be ascertained by referring to the *Subscription Books Bulletin*, published by the American Library Association.

SELECTION OF PERIODICALS. Closely allied with the problem of the choice of books is that of the selection of periodicals.

In these days of a surfeit of popular magazines even the large library must select with some care. In the smaller library the problem is a serious one. Even more than in the case of books, its solution depends on local conditions. As a rule, however, the following requirements should be met with each periodical.

1. It should be of as high standard as will be read.
2. It should offend no part of the community by its unfairness.
3. It should, if possible, be of permanent value and worth binding.
4. It should be within the means of the library.
5. The selection as a whole should cover all the important interests of the community and meet its most pressing needs.
6. It should not include periodicals which are taken in the majority of the homes unless the fund is large, or the periodical of special reference value.
7. Partisan or religious periodicals representing a single church should not be purchased. If room can be given them the official organs of well-recognized societies and denominations should be accepted as gifts. If this is done, make an effort to have the collection represent the majority of the community.

A list of "Titles for first choice" is given in F. K. Walter's *Periodicals for the small library* (p. 55-56 in the 5th edition, 1928), and the "Suggested list" contains excellent notes on these titles and many others.

SELECTION OF CHILDREN'S BOOKS. The choice of books for children is a special field, and does not come within the prov-

ince of this chapter. (See Manual XXIX, *Library work with children*, by Clara Whitehill Hunt.)

Editions. In the public library of any size the question of editions is of sufficient importance to warrant much closer study than it usually receives; in the small library hardly too much attention can be given it. Here every book, where there can be so few, should be made to count—should be frequently in demand by a reader.

The word "edition" is loosely employed in two ways: (1) for a classic or standard work in which the subject-matter is unchanged, the variation from the earlier editions or edition consisting in its physical make-up, with perhaps the addition of an introduction, notes, or appendixes; (2) for a re-publication of a work, usually of fairly modern origin, in which the text has been changed and enlarged to a greater or less extent, in order to bring it into line with present-day thought or to insert later facts or events—to "bring it up to date," in library terms. The word "reprint" is often used synonymously with "edition," but a reprint means to publishers the reprinting from the same type or plates, without change except for textual errors.

The long-held idea that the classic and standard authors should be bought as cheaply as possible because they are so little read is a mistaken one, at least with respect to those of more popular character. Even the small library must have a few books which are very seldom called for and which may well be bought in fairly cheap editions, but there is a large body of standard literature—especially fiction—which will be read almost as eagerly as the newest books if presented in the same kind of dress, with good paper, legible type, satisfactory illustrations, and attractive covers. Even readers who know the charm of Jane Austen, Charles Lamb, Thackeray, and Dickens (unknown authors to many young people except for painful memories of English lessons) are repelled by the ugly, unreadable editions which are to be found on many library shelves.

In recognition of this need there has been in recent years a considerable output of handsome editions. Some of the money all but wasted in mediocre fiction might well be diverted into this channel. Choose editions which are illustrated if the illustrations are not of the impossible type, and, if necessary, sacrifice a strong binding to attractive covers.

In the last few years there has been a noticeable development in the matter of inexpensive yet attractive editions. Some of the best of these editions are listed and annotated in the *Standard catalog for high school libraries*, part 1, under the heading "Fiction," but, of course, this list is out of date between revisions of the catalog. Many of the cheaper editions, while practical for the reader's home collection, are too small in size and are printed in too small type and on too thin paper to be desirable for library purchase. An exhibit of reprints and cheap editions (costing a dollar and less) has been made by the American Library Association and can be borrowed.

If attractive editions are worth buying for adults, they surely are for children. The average adult has opportunity outside the library to see and enjoy fine books; he may even satisfy his love for them by occasionally buying one. Many children know no better books than those they handle at school and in the public library. How is a respect for the dignity and value of literature to take root if they see nothing superior to the little cheap editions with which some children's rooms are filled? These are necessary for circulation, but all classics approved for children's reading should be represented by at least one copy each of a satisfactory edition—well printed, well illustrated, well bound—and opportunity should be given the children to read them.

Some publishers issue frequent editions of their books on growing or rapidly changing subjects. In many instances the changes and additions are important; in many more they are too slight to warrant the replacing of the older edition, except

in large libraries or in case the subject is so important as to demand the latest information. Much depends on the character of the use of the book in the individual library. In the case of a popular subject, the periodical literature will usually be found to bring it to date satisfactorily enough for the average reader. The incorporation of valuable new material or the changing of statistical data, as after a new census, often makes a new edition practically a necessity. There are doubtless hundreds of persons daily gathering material from public library books which have not been according to facts for ten, twenty, or even thirty years. Such books should either be discarded or plainly labeled as out of date.

As a rule, expensive editions should not be bought. Occasional exceptions should, however, be made where the book fund allows it. Even a few handsome volumes, or substantial, well-bound sets, give a library a charm and a look of distinction that is too often lacking, and help to create a love for books. In many new library buildings there is frequently a sad contrast between the smart, shining equipment and the books which are its sole excuse for being. It is usually in the fine arts collection that a librarian finds excuse for indulging in a few beautiful books, but every lover of good literature would like to see its great leaders—past and present—more worthily clothed.

On the other hand, there are many books which, issued first in expensive form, are as useful in the much cheaper one which follows in a few weeks or months. The difference is usually only in paper, process or amount of illustration, and binding.

Books issued in impractical white or light bindings should not be bought. If good public-library material, they will usually appear in appropriate binding in the course of time.

Publishers. The librarian who has a good knowledge of publishing houses, their history and present status, has a great advantage in book selection over the one to whom the name of a house means nothing, or at most a magazine or single type of

book. As a whole, the output of each of the older houses has certain characteristics so distinctive that those with long experience can usually name their books on sight. They can usually also name the strong points and weaknesses which are instinctively associated with each publisher. There are, of course, exceptions, and the boundaries between publishers, especially as to classes of subjects handled, are rapidly disappearing. We can no longer say that such and such a New England author's books must have been published by Houghton Mifflin, that Appleton "carries" all the good popular science, that Scribner imports the art books, etc.

While it is not possible for any one who is not constantly handling a fair proportion of a house's output to follow its development (or changes), every librarian should try to gain a knowledge of two things regarding the forty or fifty publishers who print most of the current books from which the average library selects; these are: the subjects in which they specialize, and the relative rank of their books as to their mechanical processes. Of two books on radium of seemingly even value, the one published by a house having a long record for its good scientific publications will probably be preferred. Likewise of two books on any subject, which, from all available information, differ little in textual value, the choice naturally falls on the one which is printed better and is likely to wear longer. Much of this information can be gained by constant observation and comparison of new books and by study of publishers' catalogs. It is one, but not the most important one, of the many good reasons for a librarian's forming the habit of visiting large bookstores at as frequent intervals as possible. Even if the distance is too great to admit of such a visit more than once a year, it is well worth some sacrifice of vacation pleasure to accomplish it.

Aids in Book Selection. The statement is quite safe that the majority of libraries are too far removed from book centers

to enable them to examine new books before making their selection. But even the librarian who has access to the new books is often at a loss to decide on the merits of publications in subjects of which he has no special knowledge. In the average public library he has too little time to devote to the book side of his work to keep pace with the subjects with which he has some familiarity, much less to acquire a knowledge of the new ones which arise, sufficient to make a wise selection in its literature. Only in the large libraries, where special departments with trained people at their heads and throughout the staff are possible, is the work of book selection carried on with independence from outside aid; and here the work is less that of selection, on the whole, than of collection. Hence there is absolute necessity for possessing as many aids as it is possible to have for acquiring reliable information about current literature. Help in selecting the older literature is also needed, in forming collections for new libraries, and in building up weak collections in libraries already organized.

ADVICE FROM INDIVIDUALS. This help is acquired through several different channels. The most valuable to the small library usually is, or should be, the personal assistance of a member of the state library commission or a fellow-librarian who knows the principles of selection and the books, and knows also the community sufficiently well to adapt their selection to its needs. The second-best aid should be the persons in the community who have a fundamental knowledge of a subject and keep themselves thoroughly informed of its literature; such people as the ministers, the school superintendent and principals, the heads of large industries or their assistants, professional men who know the general literature of their subjects, women who are leaders in educational and social work, etc. Many larger libraries have a "book board" composed of such citizens, into whose hands is given the task of selection, subject sometimes to the revision of the librarian, or the board of trustees. The li-

brarian in even the small town should utilize the special knowledge that is available among its citizens, but will need to scrutinize carefully the resulting recommendations. It is difficult for experts to acquire the unbiased viewpoint of the public library, to free themselves of the belief that the literature of their own subject is the most important to add. If titles submitted for purchase are not pruned, therefore, there will almost unfailingly result an over-supply of books which as a whole are useful to only a small group of readers.

PRINTED LISTS. In the average small library, "Book selection aids" mean neither of these two just discussed, but the printed lists published by the A. L. A., the H. W. Wilson Co., libraries, and library commissions. In these the selection is made from the viewpoint of the small or medium-sized library, and the annotation, when there is any, aims to give the information necessary to make a closer selection possible. Such annotation, to be most helpful, should have the following qualities: It should give an unbiased statement of the book's value, authority, scope, treatment, point of view, and style, and should indicate its special virtues or deficiencies. It should be written with the sole purpose of enabling the librarian to decide, without examination of the book itself, whether or not he should buy it and to what class of readers it will make an appeal. To be of the greatest value, sometimes to be of any value, it should make a definite comparison with earlier books on the subject.

It takes time to write a just, discriminating, and yet comprehensive note, but better a dozen of this kind than fifty of the sort known as publishers' notices. These are written to aid the sale of a book and, therefore, must be considered biased. The notes from many houses are helpful in giving information regarding the book's content, point of view, and treatment, and also the author's ability to write it, but at its best the publisher's note emphasizes a book's strong features and ignores its weak ones; at its worst, even its weak features are made to pose as

shining virtues. The public-library selection cannot be made wisely on such incomplete or prejudiced information, yet there are still librarians to be found who buy regularly from publishers' and booksellers' announcements.

The chief printed aids in book selection are too familiar to need description. They are listed at the end of this chapter.

BOOK REVIEWS. There is still another aid in selection and one which is doubtless consulted more than all others, if all classes of libraries are taken into account, and that is the book review. Its importance warrants a fuller consideration than its imitator, the publisher's notice.

The book reviews of today fall roughly into two groups; those that treat a book as a contribution to literature, science, or the arts, and those that treat it as a piece of news. The reviews in the literary, scientific, and technical periodicals are, or should be, of the first class, those in the newspapers and magazines (with a few exceptions) are of the second class. The latter review may be as scholarly in diction as the former, but it is largely descriptive in character, the tone is usually laudatory, and no attempt is made at criticism. The reviewer who treats a book as a contribution to literature usually shows some ear-marks of scholarship, a sense of responsibility to the task in hand, and some understanding of, and more than a perfunctory interest in, the subject under discussion. He sometimes even gives his reader a fair idea of the book, but this it not to be expected. He is more certain to give his own idea of the subject in hand and his conception of the proper way to treat it—which sometimes is illuminating and sometimes is not.

Both these kinds of reviews are useful in case one does not take the first class too seriously and does not fail to consider the latter as news—placing it in the same category as the publishers' notices. The news review often gives more actual information as to the subject-matter of a book, and is written more nearly from the point of view of the average reader, than the scholarly

review. Herein lies its usefulness, but unfortunately the librarian sometimes fails to wait for the latter (and it is often a long and trying wait) to make sure of the book's actual worth.

There are no wholly reliable book reviews from the librarian's point of view, which must be somewhat at variance with the expert's or college professor's point of view, and very different from that of the magazine and newspaper reviewer. The lack of balance or perspective, or the inaccuracies that ban a book for the student may not affect its value for public-library uses (although they sometimes do), while the exhaustive analyses and subtle reasonings that make a book a source of true joy to the scholar may render it useless to the average reader, and to the small library. In the case of fiction, the literary review is likely to be as misleading as the popular one. The one looks at a novel as a piece of literature, usually without regard to its possible effect, the other regards it as legitimate amusement for adults, while the librarian must judge it from his knowledge of a multi-minded public, which, having widely varying conceptions of what is interesting and uninteresting, moral and immoral, funny and only silly, fine sentiment and "sentimental bosh," subtle analysis and "dull reading," on the whole agrees remarkably well as to what the library should or should not buy with the taxpayers' money.

Sometimes by accident an ideal librarian's review appears—one which gives an adequate idea of the book's authority, an analysis of the subject-matter, definite statements as to manner of treatment, bias if any, style, virtues and defects, and a comparison with other books on the same subject. This is a good deal to ask of a reviewer except in the scholarly and professional papers, which offer something more than the book itself in payment.

In spite of the inadequacy of reviews the librarian is dependent on them to some extent. Comparative safety lies in selecting as many of the most reliable review periodicals as can be

afforded and reading them all. In this way one gradually learns the peculiarities of each and allows for them. This is especially true of periodicals having signed reviews contributed by a fairly stable corps of reviewers.

Aids in Book Selection

(For descriptive notes on the periodicals listed here, see Walter's *Periodicals for the small library*, p. 92-94.)

A. L. A. catalog, 1926. Class list: 10,925 titles; ed. by Isabella Cooper. A. L. A. 1926. \$6.

The earlier catalogs, containing 15,000 titles up to 1922, are still useful as a guide to many older books not included in the 1926 catalog. The *A. L. A. catalog, 1904* is sold by the Superintendent of Documents Office, at \$2. The 1904-1911 catalog is out of print. The 1912-1921 catalog is published by the A. L. A., \$4.25.

Best books, selected for a small public library (annual 1897-1925). Albany, New York State library. Discontinued.

Book review digest, 1905 (monthly). New York, Wilson. \$18.¹

The Booklist; a guide to new books (monthly). A. L. A. \$2.50 a yr.

Before v. 14, called "The A. L. A. Booklist."

Booklist books: a selection (annual since 1919). A. L. A. Paper, 25c-65c.

About 200 titles for the average small library.

Classified catalogs. Pittsburgh, Carnegie library.

1st series, 1895-1902. 3v.

2d series, 1902-1906. 2v.

3d series, 1907-1911. 3v.

4th series, 1912-1916. 3v. (Discontinued with this series)

Mudge, I. G. Guide to reference books. 5th ed. A. L. A., 1929. \$4 (interleaved, \$4.50).

Pope, Mildred. Buying list of books for small libraries; rev. 4th ed. A. L. A., 1925. Out of print; revision in preparation.

Sonnenschein, W. S. The best books. 3d ed. pt. 1-4 (complete in 5 pts.) Putnam, 1910-26. \$32.

Standard catalog for high school libraries: Classified list and dictionary catalog. 2,600 titles; ed. by Zaidee Brown. Wilson, 1929. \$12.¹

Supplement 1926-1928. \$1.80.

¹ These are maximum prices and are charged only to the largest libraries. The Wilson publications are sold on the service basis, i. e., the price to each library is based on the annual income of the library or the amount spent annually for books. This enables every library to obtain them at a price that is in proportion to the service obtained.

Standard catalog for public libraries. Class lists and supplements; ed. by M. E. Sears and Corinne Bacon. Wilson, 1927-29. 50c-\$2.¹

The lists for biography, social sciences, fine arts, history and travel, and fiction now in print.

Standard catalog monthly; a selected list of best books (in *Wilson Bulletin* since January, 1929). Wilson, free.

The following bulletins contain useful lists of the current books either added to the collection (in the case of libraries), or recommended by library commissions. They all have annotations.

Among our books (monthly). Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, Pa.

Books for all. Providence, R. I., public library.

Branch library book news. New York public library. 25c a yr.

The bridge. Albany, N. Y., public library.

Brooklyn public library bulletin. Brooklyn, N. Y.

More books. Boston, Mass., public library.

New York libraries (quarterly). Albany, New York State library. 25c a yr.

Ontario library review and book selection guide (quarterly). Ontario Dept. of Education, Toronto.

Open shelf (monthly). Cleveland, O., public library. 25c a yr.

St. Louis public library monthly bulletin. St. Louis, Mo.

Springfield city library bulletin. Springfield, Mass.

Wisconsin library bulletin. Wisconsin library commission, Madison, Wis. \$1 a yr.

The various publications of the book trade are useful not only to large libraries, in which they are indispensable, but also to small ones because they show what is, or was, available at a given time or in a certain country. The following list is limited to the American and English output. A more complete list can be found in Mudge's *Guide to reference books*.

Catalog of United States public documents (monthly). Washington, Supt. of Docs. 50c a yr.

The Price lists are furnished on request. The lists of current publications of the more popular departments, like the Department of Agriculture, are also very useful.

Cumulative book index, 1928-date (monthly). New York, Wilson. \$48 a yr.¹

Directory of newspapers and periodicals. New York, Ayer. \$15.

Lists monthly and weekly publications.

¹ See footnote on preceding page.

- English catalog of books (annual). New York, Bowker. \$4.
Publishers' weekly. New York, Bowker. \$5. (\$3 to libraries having an annual income of \$3,000 or less.)
Publishers' trade list annual. New York, Bowker. \$4.50.
Reference catalog of current literature (English). 3v. New York, Bowker, 1928. \$15. Issued at irregular intervals.
United States catalog: books in print 1928. New York, Wilson. \$120.¹
United States—Library of Congress. Monthly checklist of state publications. Washington, Supt. of Docs. \$1 a yr.

Book-Reviewing Periodicals

- Bookman (monthly). New York. \$5 a yr.
New York Herald Tribune Books, a weekly review of contemporary literature; ed. by Irita Van Doren. New York. \$2 a yr.
New York Times Book Review (weekly). New York. \$1 a yr.
Saturday Review of Literature; ed. by H. S. Canby. New York. \$3.50 a yr.

Of the periodicals and newspapers having a review section the most useful perhaps are the following:

American

- Atlantic Monthly ("Bookshelf" in advertising section). Boston. \$4 a yr.
Also in "Atlantic Bookshelf." \$1 a yr.
Boston Transcript (Wed. and Sat. ed.). Boston. \$3 a yr.
Forum (monthly). New York. \$2.50 a yr.
Harper's Monthly Magazine (monthly). New York. \$4 a yr.
Nation (weekly). New York. \$5 a yr.
New Republic (weekly). New York. \$5 a yr.
North American Review (monthly). New York. \$4 a yr.
Yale Review (quarterly). New Haven. \$4 a yr.

English

- London Mercury (monthly). London. \$9 (library rate).
London Times Literary Supplement (weekly). London. \$4.34 a yr. (library rate).
Nation and Athenaeum (weekly). London. \$7.50 a yr. (library rate).
New Statesman (weekly). London. \$7.50 a yr. (library rate).
Spectator (weekly). London. \$7.50 a yr. (library rate).

Special Subjects

In some subjects selection can be made wholly from general lists; in others special lists are valuable aids, either in furnishing additional or more recent titles or in confirming the choice of titles made from the general lists. The date of the special list should be carefully noted and the more recent books on the subject should be examined if possible. The source of special lists should be considered, the selection in some being more reliable than in others.

For the convenience of their readers large libraries print many lists which include practically everything the library contains on a subject. Such lists are useful to the small library because they show what material is available, but they should be used not as a selection, but as a basis for selection, just as one would use the card catalog of a large library. The briefer reference lists included in library bulletins (and sometimes issued separately also) usually represent a selection and are often very helpful. An index to these was compiled by the Providence Public Library and published by the Boston Book Co. in 1907 and is continued annually in the *Bulletin of Bibliography* (F. W. Faxon Co. \$3). Many good lists are published also by societies and associations organized to promote definite lines of work.

Good lists on a subject are often to be found in new books. If they are selected and annotated they are especially valuable; if merely a list of the books the author has consulted their value is questionable.

To learn of new bibliographies and lists it is necessary to keep close watch of library periodicals. The sections devoted to this purpose in the *Library Journal* and *Libraries*, the second alphabet in the *Publishers' Weekly* list of new books, and notes in the library commission bulletins are the most fruitful sources.

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